

Australia consolidated its position as a prominent education destination for international students in 2000, with international student numbers increasing by 15.6 per cent on the previous year. The number of international students studying in all sectors grew from 162,865 to 188,277, according to statistics from the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (Detya). Almost all the education sectors in Australia experienced a healthy increase in student numbers last year, apart from the secondary school sector which recorded a decrease of 3.8 per cent (see box right).

"Critical mass has been achieved, and the US and the UK now publicly acknowledge Australia as a major player [in the international education market]," asserts Vernon Bruce, General Manager of International Education at William Angliss Institute of Tafe in Victoria.

The higher education sector dominated the international education market, claiming 57 per cent of the total international student population in 2000. Large annual increases in international student numbers over the last six years have resulted in a growth explosion for this sector, with enrolments rising from 43,721 in 1994 to 107,622 in 2000. The largest annual hike in numbers occurred in 2000 when they increased by 19 per cent, proving that growth in this sector is showing no sign of levelling off.

This increase can largely be attributed to the huge rise in Chinese enrolments in 2000, which increased by 69 per cent, while traditional Asian markets such as Singapore and Hong Kong remained strong and made up the largest student nationalities in all sectors. "The People's Republic of China [is showing the most promise for the future] because of the sheer size of the market and the rapid increase in affordability [of international studies]," says Peter Day, Manager of International Student Recruitment at the University of Wollongong in New South Wales. "[This is due to] a growing middle class and the one-child policy, which is the generation now coming into their late teens."

Heather Ulanas, Marketing Officer at Sydney West International College, believes that the Chinese market will become increasingly important in the future. "China will definitely become the growth centre

of the world after recently signing with the World Trade Organisation. China will now compete on an equal footing commercially with the rest of the world and open up its borders for trade, both in imports and exports," she says.

However, while Asia remains the dominant student market for Australia – 82 per cent of the international student population in Australia in 2000 were Asian – there are signs that markets such as Europe



and the Americas are gaining ground. Enrolments from both North and South America increased by 40 per cent in 2000 and students from Europe increased by 35 per cent. Keith Hyde, General Manager for International Marketing and Business Development at the University of Canberra, is planning to target China, the USA and Europe in the future. "The USA wants to get more students off shore into safe English-speaking countries," he claims.

Safety is a key selling point for institutions keen on increasing their international student numbers. "Australia represents peace, wide open spaces, safe and clean cities, and high educational standards," says Ulanas. "The Australian climate is popular and Australia will be considered a safer haven than the USA in the light of the unrest between the USA and Afghanistan."

Australia flies high

Increased international marketing from the Australian education industry has boosted overseas student numbers in recent years, but changes in visa regulations are certain to affect some nationalities this year. **Bethan Norris** reports.



Top international student nationalities in Australia 1998-2000

	1998	1999	% change	2000	% change
Singapore	16,509	19,207	16.3	20,866	8.6
Hong Kong	18,161	18,833	3.7	20,739	10.1
Malaysia	16,485	16,544	0.4	19,602	18.5
Indonesia	17,715	19,172	8.2	17,868	-6.8
China	5,273	8,859	68	14,948	68.7
South Korea	11,150	9,633	-13.6	11,485	19.2
India	8,073	9,581	18.7	10,572	10.3
Japan	10,739	9,828	-8.5	10,220	4
Thailand	6,299	6,709	6.5	8,179	21.9
Taiwan	6,403	5,912	-7.7	6,104	3.2
Other countries	34,637	38,587	11.4	47,694	23.6
Total	151,444	162,865	7.5	188,277	15.6

Source: Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (Detya)

Overseas students in Australia by education sector 1998-2000

	1998	1999	% change	2000	% change
Higher education	56,810	60,914	7.2	72,717	19.4
Off-shore higher education	22,538	29,481	30.8	34,905	18.4
Vocational education	29,937	29,593	-1.1	30,759	3.9
High school education	14,803	13,651	-7.8	13,129	-3.8
Elicos	27,356	29,226	6.8	36,767	25.8

Source: Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (Detya)

Napaporn Ongwijitwat, General Manager of TIE Thai International Education, believes that Thai students are attracted to study in Australia mainly for financial reasons. "I think that the biggest effect on the number of clients [studying abroad] last year was our country's continuous economic recession. Some of the students who [were interested] in studying abroad have had to change their [minds] and further their [studies] at the local universities instead," she says. However, those who do go abroad are increasingly choosing cheaper destinations. "Studying in Australia is still significantly cheaper compared to other famous English native-speaking countries such as the USA or the UK," she adds.

Changes in visa regulations have made it more difficult for students from some countries to

enter Australia (see *Education Travel Magazine*, October, page 19). This will certainly affect student numbers, although it is difficult to tell at this stage what impact they will have.

However, many institutions in Australia are already beginning to adapt their marketing strategies accordingly. Bruce believes that the vocational education training (VET) sector in particular is facing an uncertain future because of the visa changes. "We are anticipating a slowdown in interest from [visa] category three and four countries [such as India and China which have the strictest regulations] because candidates can no longer take bank loans to finance their studies in the VET sector," says Bruce. "Perhaps Brazil and Colombia and also European countries including Scandinavia will become interesting markets for Tafe. Resources will need

to be diverted from category three and four countries to [category] one and two countries."

Other institutions are making the most of the benefits of having education consultants in certain countries. "We work closely with agents in countries where visas are difficult to obtain. Most of the agent's work involves guiding the student through the visa process rather than course counselling," says Day. ○

Selection of institutions in Australia High school education

Cabra Dominican College, Cumberland Park, SA; Toorak College, Mount Eliza, VIC; Whitefriars College, Donvale, VIC.

Higher education

Barrier Reef Institute of Tafe, Townsville, QLD; Hills Educational Foundation, Jimboomba, QLD; La Trobe University, Bundoora, VIC; Sydney West International College, Sydney, NSW; University of Canberra, Canberra, ACT; University of Wollongong, NSW; William Angliss Institute of Tafe, Melbourne, VIC.

High schools

Contrary to the Detya statistics, which reveal a drop of 3.8 per cent in the number of international students studying in high schools in Australia in 2000, many individual schools report that student numbers grew that year. "We saw a significant increase in demand [from international students]," says Noel Thomas, Deputy Principal of Planning and Administration at Toorak College in Victoria. "For us it was 1999 that was below expectation, probably due to the impact of the economic downturn in Thailand being more protracted than first thought. Enrolments [in 2000] were healthy and this has continued in 2001."

According to Detya, the high school sector has experienced a decrease in international students for the last three years, although there is evidence that this is beginning to tail off as figures for 2000 showed the smallest decrease so far.

"Our three biggest markets are China, Hong Kong and Indonesia," says Evelyn Diradji, from Whitefriars College in Victoria. "China and Hong Kong have increased as recruitment continued but Indonesia has decreased dramatically, due perhaps to political uncertainty in that country affecting family decisions about secondary-school aged boys."

"[Indonesia] stayed constant through the Asian economic crisis, contrary to the general trend," says Shane Brady, Business Manager at Cabra Dominican College in South Australia. "But [it] has now showed a distinct downward trend. We believe this is due to political instabilities and the increased provision of on-shore English tuition in Indonesia."

China replaced Indonesia as the top international high school student nationality in 2000 as student numbers from this country increased by 62 per cent to 2,348, while numbers from Indonesia decreased by 21 per cent to 2,079. "China shows the most promise for the future if the visa application process can be improved," says Diradji.